

A HISTORY OF
THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE
AND
THE LEONARDO ROMERO FAMILY
AND
THE SEVERIN RAMBAUD FAMILY

by
Bettina Lyons
Curator of Historic Sites
Tucson Museum of Art

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THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

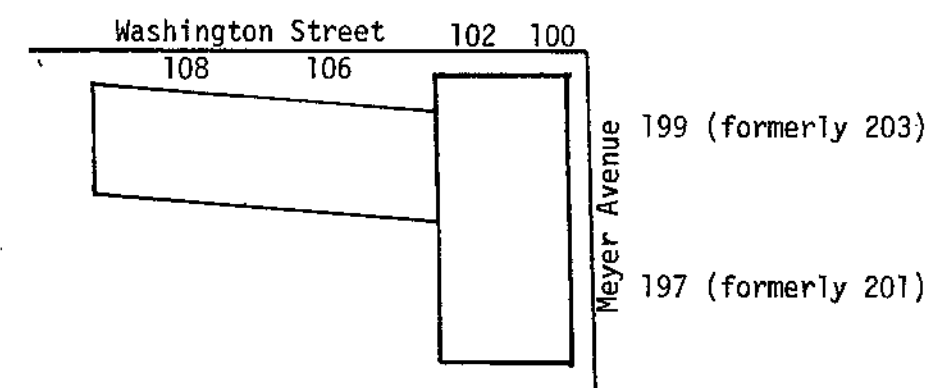
Property History-----	p. 1
Property Deed Recordings-----	p. 6
Sanborn Fire Map Sections-----	p. 7
Biography of Leonardo Romero-----	p. 8
Biography of Leonardo Elijio Romero-----	p. 10
Leonardo Romero Family Tree-----	p. 12
Biography of Severin Rambaud-----	p. 13
Biography of Refugio Diaz de Rambaud-----	p. 14
Notes-----	p. 17
Bibliography-----	p. 18

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

PROPERTY HISTORY Block 183, City of Tucson, Lot 1

Addresses: 100, 102, 106, & 108 West Washington Street
195, 197, 199 North Meyer Avenue (formerly 201 & 203 N. Meyer Street)

Current address: 101 W. Washington Street



The Leonardo Romero House is the "L-shaped" building at the southwest corner of Washington and Meyer streets. Currently occupied by the Tucson Museum of Art School, this house has been altered many times over the years and has seen a variety of uses since it was constructed in the 1860's.

This historic building has gone from private dwelling to rental apartments, and finally was used for a variety of commercial endeavors. Many of the original adobe walls were replaced with brick, and the flat mud roof on the Washington Street side has been covered with a gabled roof.

In spite of these physical changes and the many tenants and businesses that have come and gone, the Leonardo Romero House has an interesting story to tell.

Legend has it that the Spanish Presidio Wall, completed in 1783, which was constructed along what is now Washington Street from Main to Court, was incorporated in a section of the Romero House. Maria Cordova tells the story that the wall that forms a jog with the rest of the house on Washington, was once part of Tucson's walled city.¹

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE Property History

Ted Sayles, archaeologist and former curator of the Arizona State Museum, was the last tenant to live in the Washington section. Sayles recounted in an interview with the Arizona Daily Star in 1965, that he believed the original south wall of the Washington Street wing was part of the soldiers' barracks within the Presidio.²

None of these stories were substantiated even after archaeological exploration was done south of the Romero House in 1968 by the Arizona State Museum.³

This historic building has been named for its first known resident, Leonardo Romero. Leonardo Romero, Junior recalled in 1945, that he was pleased that the house in which he was born, which is at Meyer and Washington street still stands.⁴ There is some discrepancy in the date of his birth, but it occurred sometime between December, 1868, and April, 1871.

We do not know when the "Romero House" was built. It was not in existence when the first map of Tucson was surveyed by John B. Mills in 1862. At that time the property was owned by Teodoro Ramirez. There is no record of the transfer of this lot, but Guadalupe Martinez owned the property on September 22, 1871, when he sold it to Leonardo Romero.⁵

Guadalupe Martinez was living in Tucson in 1862.⁶ He is included in the 1864 Tucson Census, as 30 years old, married to Maria, age 20, and father of four children. According to the Census, Martinez was born in Sonora and came to Tucson in 1850. The value of his property in 1864 was \$195. In 1870, the Census records that Martinez had seven children, was a laborer and had property worth \$150.

Did Martinez build the "Romero House"? Did he, his wife, and seven children ever live on the property? These are questions that we are unable to answer at this time. The only fact we know is that Leonardo Romero purchased the property for \$300 from Guadalupe Martinez on September 22, 1871, and that his son was born

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE Property History

in a house on the property, probably in 1868.

Leonardo Romero was the town carpenter. His shop was located in the Meyer Avenue wing of the house.⁷ He and his wife, Librada, and young children lived in the Washington Street wing. By 1881, Romero had moved to Church Street,⁸ and in September, 1884, he sold the property to Severin Rambaud for \$700 gold coin.⁹

At the time Severin Rambaud purchased the "Romero" property, he was a baker. A few years later he began to invest in ranches and real estate. In 1892, he married Refugio Diaz Carrillo, and together they made the "Romero House" their home. They remodeled the house extensively in the 1890's.¹⁰ The Rambauds made the Meyer Avenue wing of the house into their living quarters. They raised the ceilings and added a corner fireplace. A front and rear porch were also added. The Washington Street wing was converted into rental apartments.¹¹

Mrs. Jose Miranda, daughter of a cousin of Refugio Rambaud used to spend her summers living and working for her "tia" (aunt). She remembers the Rambauds' home as a well furnished, comfortable house filled with books belonging to her uncle. The living room was in the northeast corner with a window facing Washington Street. The dining room looked out back. There were lots of flowers and trees, but no walled patio. There was a front porch on Meyer Street and a picket fence south along Meyer. Mr. Rambaud kept his horses in a corral in back of the house.¹²

Mr. Rambaud died in 1918. Mrs. Rambaud and her husband's nephew, Jean Rambaud, continued to live in the family home. In 1926, they moved to a new house that Mrs. Rambaud had constructed on vacant property she owned directly to the south.¹³

Mrs. Rambaud leased her old home as five separate apartments. Refugio died in 1934 and left her former home, "the Romero House" to her great niece, Maria Navarrete Cordova.¹⁴

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE Property History

Mrs. Cordova leased the property to a variety of tenants, never living in the house herself. Sometime in the 1930's the Washington wing was completely rebuilt as a gasoline and service station.¹⁵ Cars could drive through the building at the corner. The business did not succeed and by 1944 the opening was filled in with brick.¹⁶ All that remains of the original house on the Meyer Avenue side is the interior west wall. From 1948 to 1953, the corner (199 N. Meyer) was leased to Nu Art for a photo service laboratory. Old Wall Art Musuem was located here in 1954, followed by Friendly's Studio and Work Shop, which rented the entire wing until 1962, after which Theater West leased the corner for three years.¹⁷

Los Tecolotes Restaurant was established in the south end of the Meyer Street section in 1931. Its sign still exists and is faintly legible. Tenants lived in this section until another Mexican restaurant, Arizona Zarape Cafe, occupied the space in 1940-1941.

A string of tenants came and went from the three apartments at 102, 106 and 108 Washington Street. Still an adobe structure, this portion of the house retains much of its early character. The original ceilings and flat roof were replaced with a gabled and shingled roof.

Because of the many alterations, it is impossible for us to tell how the house might have looked when the Romero and Rambaud families lived there.

In 1968, the City of Tucson condemned the property under the Urban Redevelopment Act. Mrs. Cordova and her son, Raul, contested the condemnation which included their home at 173 North Meyer (La Casa Cordova). The suit was settled in favor of the City of Tucson in May, 1972. In 1973, the City leased this property, along with the entire block, to the Tucson Museum of Art. The Museum is currently using the building for its ceramic and graphic classes. Renovation was completed in

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE
Property History

September, 1980, with the assistance of a Community Development Block Grant
awarded by the City of Tucson.

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

Property History of Block 183, City of Tucson, lot 1

TUCSON PROPERTY RECORDS 1862-64, Recorded by William Sanders Oury

1862-64 Teodoro Ramirez recorded his property and described it as follows:

...bounded on the north by the Old Presidio Wall, on the east by property of *Dolores Grijalva, on the south by the Military Plaza, on the west by the property of W. S. Oury, having front of 45 veras on the Military Plaza by 50 veras in depth to the old wall. (p. 15)

*There is no separate record of property owned by Dolores Grijalva, but there is a record (on p. 53) of property owned by Dolores Vilducea which is described as:

...this lot with house on it which has since fallen down...north to south 22 veras and from east to west 24 veras and bounded on the north by the Old Presidio Wall.

A Dolores Valendencia owned the property east of Teodoro Ramirez in 1871.

PROPERTY DEED BOOKS Pima County Records Office

Sept. 22, 1871 Gualalupe Martinez & Maria Munguia, his wife, to Leonardo Romero for \$300 (book 1, pp. 571.2). The property is described as follows:

...bounded on the west by Granville & William S. Oury, on the north by public lands, east by house and lot of Dolores Valendencia, on the south by lot owned by Teodoro Ramirez.

There is no surviving record of when and from whom Guadalupe Martinez acquired this parcel of land. From the property description there was at least one structure on the property at the time of the sale.

May 17, 1882 Corporation of Tucson to Leonardo Romero (book 11, p. 360).

Sept. 27, 1884 Leonardo Romero & wife (Librada) to Severin Rambaud et al & L. Brustlein for \$700 gold coin (book 12, p. 519).

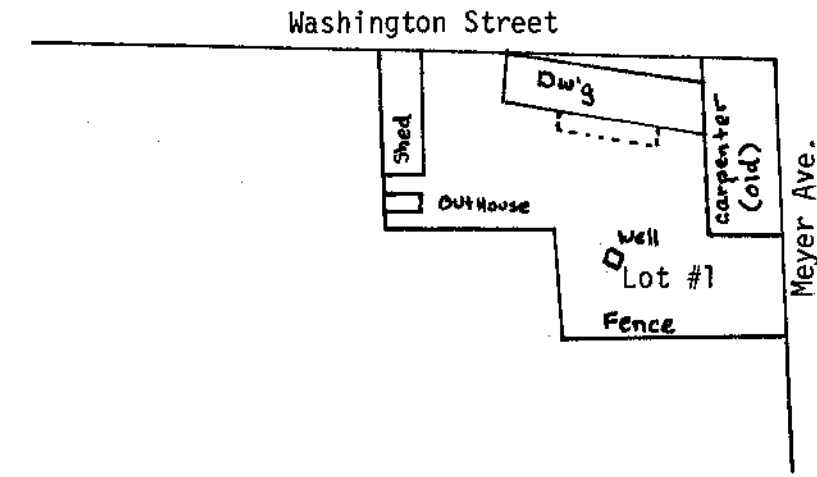
Feb. 8, 1919 Estate of Severin Rambaud to his widow, Refugio Rambaud (book 71, p. 555).

Nov. 14, 1936 Estate of Refugio Rambaud to Maria Navarrete Cordova (her great niece) (book 196, p. 425).

1972 City of Tucson by condemnation

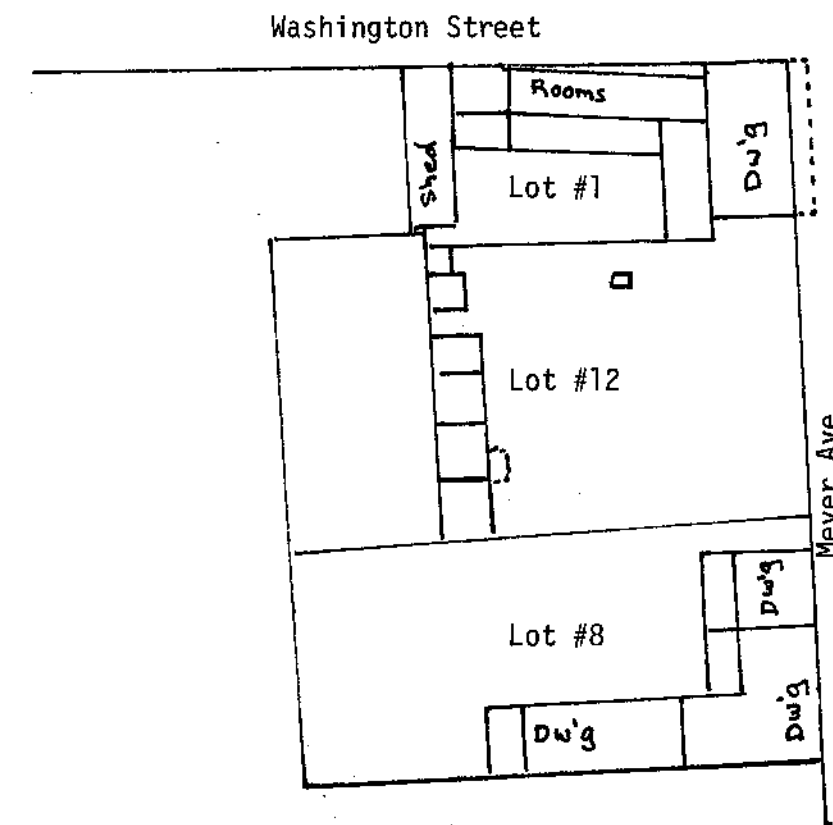
LEONARDO ROMERO

Property History



1883 Sanborn Fire map (section)

Leonardo Romero property
(Blk. 183, lot 1)



1901 Sanborn Fire Map (section)

Severin Rambaud property
(Blk. 183, lots 1, 12, 8)

- Lot #1 Romero/Ramnaud House
- Lot #12 Formerly property of Teodoro Ramirez & later his son, Manuel Ramirez
- Lot #8 Formerly property of Gabino & Carmen Ortega & later of Manuel & Carmen Coronado (her second husband) & finally of Raul Cordova, son of Maria Navarrete Cordova.

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF LEONARDO ROMERO 1847-1926

Leonardo Romero was born in Hermosillo, Sonora. He came to Tucson as a boy with his father, Ramon, and family.¹⁸ The 1860 Tucson Census lists a Ramon Romero, a farmer born in Mexico, age 70, with Luz Romero, a Mexican, age 75. No children are listed with this couple, but Leonardo would have been 13 years old in 1860, and it is possible that these were his parents.

According to the reminiscences of Leonardo Romero, Junior, his grandfather once asked his son, a carpenter, not to make a coffin for him when he died. His son felt very badly about this request and went to the Bishop for guidance. The Bishop said, "You must mind your father but you can dig the grave and fix it so that you can put boards over his body," and that is what Leonardo did.¹⁹

Leonardo was the town carpenter. As a young man, he was working on the construction of the first St. Augustine Church (torn down in 1936) when he met and fell in love with 18-year-old Maria Librada Morales.²⁰ They were married by Rev. Francisco Jouvenceau at St. Augustine's Church, December 15, 1868.

Librada was the daughter of Francisca Morales. She was born in Sonora, but came to Tucson when she was 10. According to Mrs. Mary Venuti, her great grandmother, Librada's mother, was a wealthy lady who owned a home near the present site of the Tucson Museum of Art. The earliest property records indicate that Francisca Morales began purchasing property in Tucson in 1868. In December of 1868, she purchased a piece of property from her daughter and son-in-law, Leonardo Romero, for \$300.²¹ Over the years, Mrs. Morales bought and sold real estate. The 1870 Census lists her property holdings as worth \$2,300, a considerable sum in those days. At that time she was 38 years old, a seamstress with two children, Carlos and Francisca, living with her. According to Mrs. Venuti,

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE
Biography of Leonardo Romero

Mrs. Morales was not happy with her daughter's marriage to a carpenter. She had hoped to have her marry a rich man.

Mrs. Venuti recalls that her grandmother "was a nice quiet person who went blind in her later years." Librada moved to California to live with her daughter, Ramona, and died there, March 13, 1934.

The Romero's had six children: Leonardo Elijio, Diego, Ramona, Josefa, Feliciano and Ysidoro.

As a carpenter, Leonardo helped to finish the first St. Augustine Church and convent which was completed in 1868 for the Sisters of St. Joseph. He also built all the furniture for the Sisters. Leonardo, Junior, remembered how, at one time, the family moved out to San Xavier Mission and lived upstairs on the east side of the church while his father helped to repair the Mission.²² According to his descendants, Romero also helped to build the present St. Augustine Cathedral which was completed in 1896. Mrs. Venuti says that her grandfather was a jack-of-all-trades. As a carpenter, he made all the coffins for those who died. He ran a grocery store at the Mission, and also at Granada and St. Mary's Road near where he lived in later years.²³ The Pima County Property Records indicate that Romero, like his mother-in-law, bought and sold many parcels of real estate over the years.

Mr. Romero lived in the "Romero House" not more than thirteen years, at which time he moved his family to Church Street. For many years the family lived at 241 East 6th Street.²⁴

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF LEONARDO ELIJIO ROMERO 1868-1959

Leonardo, Junior, lived in the "Romero House" during the first twelve years of his life. According to his own recollections, he was born in December, 1868. His Baptismal Certificate, on file at St. Augustine Cathedral, has recorded April 6, 1871, as the date of his birth, and April 9, 1871, as the date of his baptism. There really is no explanation for this, because the 1870 Census lists Leonardo as two years old, thus clearly substantiating that he was born in 1868.

Leonardo was the oldest of six children. In a newspaper interview in 1945, he fondly looked back to his youth when he recalled working in grocery stores and a saloon where the downtown Valley National Bank now stands. As a boy, he went out to the lake at the base of "A" Mountain and hunted while his father went to Solomon Warner's Steam Mill and exchanged a sack of wheat for one of flour. He recalled attending cock fights and Mexican Circuses. He received his education at the old Congress Street School.²⁵ For a time he worked for his uncle helping to drive oxen pulling logs from the Catalinas to be converted into lumber.²⁶

Romero recalls that one of the greatest days of his life was March 20, 1880, the day the first train came to Tucson. The 12-year-old boy was right in the middle of the celebration. "Everyone made speeches and the whole town was lit up, and there was dancing and music until late at night."²⁷

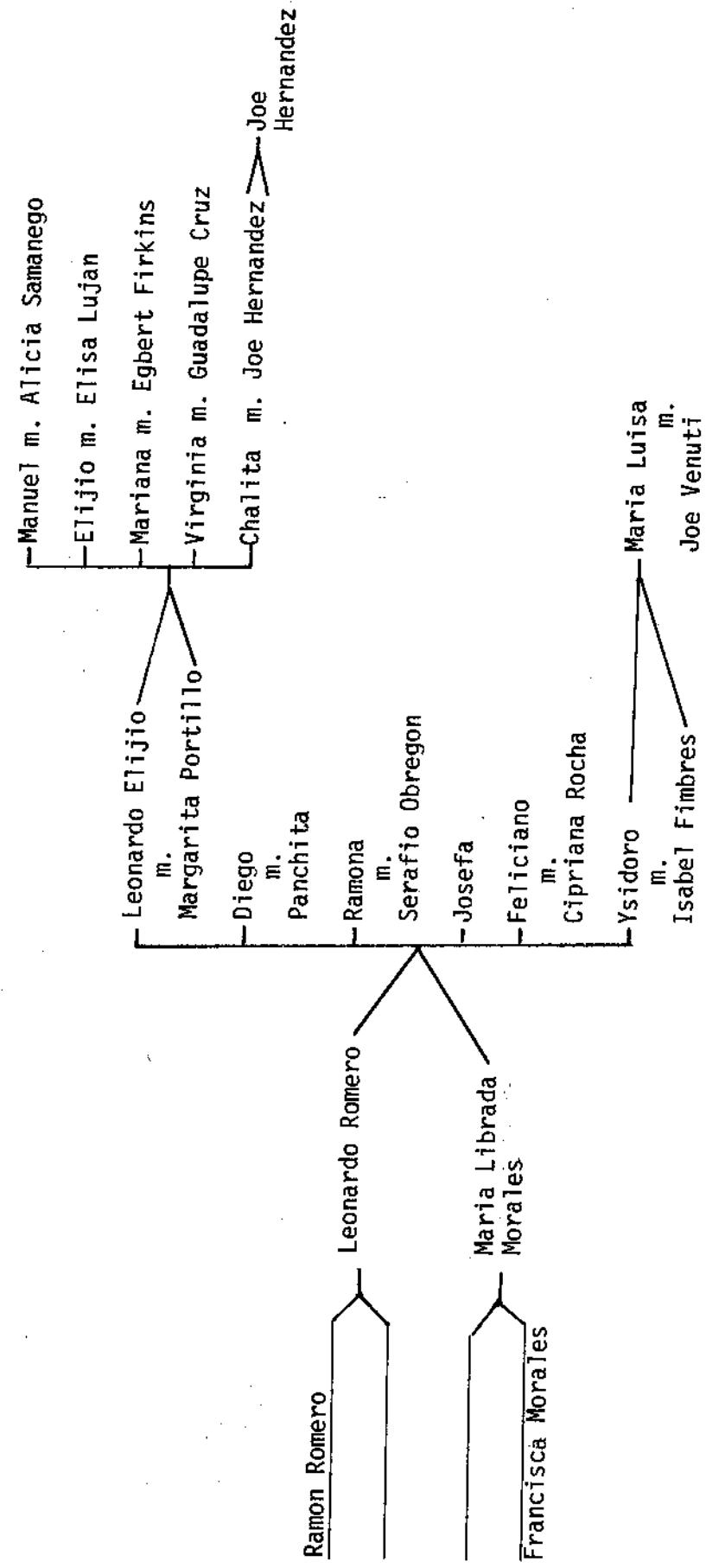
In 1899, nineteen years later, Romero went to work as a pipe-fitter for the Southern Pacific where he was employed for 34 years. His specialty was copper work and he remembered making repairs to Locomotive #1673, now on display in a Tucson park.²⁸

His brother, Ysidoro, also spent 54 years working for the Southern Pacific, starting as a coal passer on a passenger train where he earned \$1 per day at 10¢ per hour.²⁹

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE
Biography of Leonardo Elijio Romero

Leonardo married Margarita Portillo. They had six children: Manuel, Gila, Mariana, Chalita, Virginia and Elijio.

Mr. Romero cared a great deal about the history of his family and early Tucson. He once made a wooden model of the first St. Augustine Church after it was torn down. He recounted to a newspaper reporter in 1945 that his children and grandchildren "don't know much about early days in Tucson and there's not much for them to see in buildings...But our history ought to be saved."³⁰ Mr. Romero would be proud that his birth place and his family's history lives on.



THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF SEVERIN RAMBAUD 1845-1918

Severin Rambaud was born in 1845 in Marseilles, France. He came to Tucson in the early 1880's after having become an American citizen in San Francisco on March 22, 1880.³¹ In 1883, Rambaud was running a French bakery at 104 Camp Street. Later he earned his living from real estate and cattle ranching investments. In 1884, he purchased the "Romero House" from Leonardo Romero for \$700 in gold coin. He later bought the two lots immediately to the south; lot #12 in 1890, from Manuel Ramirez; lot #8 and house (La Casa Cordova) in 1896 from Carmen (widow of Gabino Ortega) and Manuel Coronado.

Rambaud married Refugio Diaz, widow of Manuel Carrillo, on December 10, 1892, and together they made their home at 203 North Meyer Avenue (the "Romero House"). The Rambauds had no children of their own, but in 1915, Severin sent to France for his nephew, Jean Rambaud, in the hopes of marrying him to his wife's niece, Antonia Pascale.³² The match did not materialize, but Jean, known in Tucson as Frenchie, lived with his aunt and uncle as their son.

Severin Rambaud died January 28, 1918. At the time of his death he owned twelve pieces of real estate worth \$14,100. His home was valued at \$2,240. He bequeathed half interest in all personal and real estate property to his wife, Refugio. The remainder he divided equally between his nephew, Jean, and his two sisters, Salina Macare and Naomie Drac, residing in France.³³

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

BIOGRAPHY OF REFUGIO DIAZ DE RAMBAUD 1857-1934

Refugio Diaz was born in Hermosillo, Sonora, and came to Tucson in 1862 with her father, Jose Maria Diaz, a shoemaker. She married Manuel Carrillo in their home in Tucson November 20, 1877. Very little is known about their life together. Carrillo was a cattleman, according to his great niece, Maria Cordova. He did not own property, is not listed in the City census records or city directories, and there is no probate record of a will.

Refugio was a widow at the time of her marriage to Severin Rambaud on December 10, 1892, at St. Augustine Church.

Antonia Pascale spent summers living and working for her aunt. Her father, John Pascale, lived with his family on their ranch in Sahuarito, 18 miles south of Tucson. Antonia remembers how her aunt loved to dress up and wear beautiful jewelry. She would rent a two-horse carriage with fringe on top for 25¢, and with her lacy parasol in hand, would visit the Pascale family at their town home. Mrs. Rambaud had hoped to marry her niece to Jean Rambaud, her husband's nephew, but Antonia insisted on marrying Jose Miranda, the man she loved.³⁴

Mrs. Rambaud, who was fondly called Dona Cuca, was widowed again in 1918. She built a house for herself and Jean Rambaud, now her legally adopted son, at 189 North Meyer (directly south of the "Romero House"), where she lived the rest of her life. She leased her former home to tenants and businesses for additional income. After her husband's death, Refugio began to sell the property she had inherited. Some say she was taken advantage of by an "American" man who became her third husband. According to former neighbors, the "American" got her to sell her real estate, took her money and left her in debt.³⁵ The record shows that she did sell all of her properties, with the exception of the three houses she

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE
Biography of Refugio Diaz de Rambaud

owned in the Tucson Museum of Art block. She did not remarry, as her name remained "Refugio Rambaud, a widow" on all legal documents, and there is no record of her having married a third time.

The last years of Refugio's life are somewhat of a mystery. Her son, Jean, continued to live with her until her death, but for whatever reason, Refugio must have had a falling out with him and with her sister, Teresa Benson, because in 1933 she executed her last will and testament and bequeathed only \$10 to Jean and \$50 to her sister. The bulk of her estate was bequeathed to Maria Navarrete Cordova, the grandchild of her sister, Nieves de Forts. Maria was 30 years old, married, with four children, and living in Phoenix at the time her great aunt made out her will. Besides Jean and her sister, Refugio's family consisted of thirteen nieces and nephews, the children and grandchildren of her sister, Nieves. Apparently Maria and her family had come to mean a great deal to Refugio in her last years, because Maria was to inherit the "Romero House" and all of her aunt's personal belongings. Maria's son, five-year-old Arturo, was to inherit "La Casa Cordova."³⁶

Just fifteen days before her death, Refugio was persuaded to execute a new will which she signed with an "X." In this will she divided her two houses between her sister, Teresa, and Jean Rambaud.³⁷ Refugio died October 18, 1934, and both wills were filed. Maria Cordova contested the second will and won her case on November 14, 1936. The house in between (in both wills) was left to Robert Lopez, Refugio's godchild. Robert had been born and raised next door in "La Casa Cordova."

Maria Cordova divorced her husband, Raul, and she and her children moved to Tucson, and made "La Casa Cordova" their home. Mrs. Cordova continued to lease the "Romero House" and used the income to help support her family.

Jean Rambaud married in 1936, and he and his wife, Sarah, lived at 485 North Main.

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE
Biography of Refugio Diaz de Rambaud

They had a daughter, Mary Jeane. Rambaud earned his living first as a tinner, then as a foreman for the Southern Pacific Railroad, finally as a pipeman for the City of Tucson Water Department. He died November 27, 1945.

THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

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14. Refugio Rambaud, Last Will & Testament, Superior Court of Pima Count, (file #5924), Oct. 19, 1934.
15. Mrs. Solidad Tarazon & Angela Peyron, interviewed by Bettina Lyons (Tucson, Az.), Jan 25, 1978.
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35. Tarazon, Interview.
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THE LEONARDO ROMERO HOUSE

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